during a recent conference of Chief Electoral Officers to bar independent candidates from contesting elections and holding a preliminary round of election to reduce the number of candidates;

(b) if so, whether Government are considering these suggestions; and

(c) if not, what are the reasons thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF LAW AND JUSTICE (SHRI H. R. BHARDWAJ): (a) Yes, Sir.

During the Conference of the Chief Electoral Officers held at New Delhi on the 28th and 30th December, 1985, the Chief Election Commissioner requested the participants to consider, among other things, the barring of independent candidates from contesting elections and holding a preliminary first round of election on a sample basis to screen out candidates failing to secure a minimum of votes. The Conference, however, did not favour the suggestions.

(b) and (c) Do not arise.

655. [*Withdrawn*].

656. [*Withdrawn*].

Quicker delivery of registered letters

657. SHRI R. SAMBASIVA RAO: Will the the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Department of Posts have recently prescribed a new procedure to ensure the quicker delivery of registered letters and also introduced a scheme of licensed postal agencies; and

(b) if so, what are the details in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI RAM NIWAS MIRDHA): (a) 1. No general new procedure has been prescribed recently for quicker delivery of registered letters. However a scheme of delivery of registered letters at the Post Office window for post box holders has been introduced.

2. The Department has also introduced a scheme of Licenced Postal Agencies.

(b) 1. Post-Box holders who agree to the scheme will have to give authority to the postmaster of the office of delivery to hand over registered letters addressed to them (duly invoiced in list and sealed in a cover or a bag) to the messenger who collects unregistered mail from the Post Box. The addressee taking delivery will return one copy of the list to the Post Office along with the refused articles, if any. The scheme is voluntary.

2. Under the Licenced Postal Agencies Scheme Charitable Institution/Women's organisations/Co-operatives/War widows/Physically handicapped persons as well as commercial individuals and concerns may be granted licences to work as Postal Agents.

The following Postal Functions are assigned to Licenced Postal Agents:—

1. Sale of Postage Stamps and Stationery;

2. Booking of Registered Letters;

3. Clearance of Letter Boxes, and

4. Any other work assigned by the competent authority.

A commission of 5 per cent is paid to the Licenced Postal Agents on the sale of the Postage Stamps and Stationery. In addition a commission of 50 paise per article is also paid on the registered letters booked and despatched to Post Office.